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Remarks of Peter S. Hoff

University of Maine President

Annual New Academic Year News Conference

Sept. 2, 1999

Good morning. Thank you for joining us for our annual back-to-school news conference.

Next Tuesday the University of Maine begins its 132nd fall semester. The first time this university opened its doors, back in September of 1868, it welcomed 12 students -- all men, as was generally the case in higher education at the time. The members of that pioneer class enrolled to learn more about agriculture, the mechanic arts, and the liberal arts. All 12 were from Maine. All of them enrolled in this new entity known to us today as a land-grant college. Their goals: to help themselves become more self-reliant, more appreciative of their heritage and culture, and better able to engage in the operation of their farms, their communities, and in commerce.

The first-year students arriving over the next few days have some similarities with their predecessors. They are coming here to better themselves educationally, culturally, and socially. They expect Maine's flagship university to offer them broad opportunities and challenges that they cannot find anywhere else in the state. And they expect to succeed.

But in many other ways, this year's class of first-year students is much different. There are over sixteen hundred more students arriving this year than arrived in Orono in 1868. They come to UMaine from all parts of the state, most parts of the country, and many parts of the world. They are far better educated in their studies and much more sophisticated in their understanding of the world. They are preparing to study subjects unheard of back then, using learning techniques and technologies beyond the imagination 130 years ago. And while today's students, like their 19th century predecessors, are here to become more self-reliant, more knowledgeable, and better prepared for economic and community life, the "community" and economy for which they are preparing is now truly global in nature.

As our student expectations have changed over the years, so, too, has this university. Today's discussion of the University of Maine's Class of 2003 takes place during an exciting, forward-thinking time -- a time when the University is growing its enrollment, showcasing its excellence, serving the public, and demonstrating its value to the people of Maine.

Today I am pleased to offer you a profile of our student body. The profile includes both students joining us for the first time and those returning to UMaine to continue their studies.

When classes resume Tuesday, we will greet 1,647 new students. Together they comprise the largest first-year class we've welcomed in eight years. This new group of students represents a 15 percent increase in number over last year's incoming class, and a 42 percent increase over two years ago.

But along with the dramatic increase in enrollment, we have maintained our high academic standards. The new students arrive with an average SAT score of 1,087. That's virtually the same score as we've averaged in each of the previous two years. That SAT score is 71 points above the national average and 73 points above the state average. We take a lot of pride in the fact that our students' SAT scores consistently and significantly exceed the state and national averages.

As we point out every year, SAT scores are just one measure of quality. Another measure is class standing. This year almost 20 percent of our incoming students finished in the top ten percent of their high school graduating

class. Thirty-eight percent finished high school with grades that placed them in the top 20 percent of their graduating class.

This year the University's most prestigious scholarship opportunity, our Top Scholars program, has attracted 58 of Maine's 1999 high school valedictorians and salutatorians. We are pleased that they have chosen to stay in Maine and attend their home state's flagship university. As their schools' highest-ranking students, they could have attended just about any college or university they desired. Our state and our university benefit by their choice to come to Orono.

Speaking of choices, 73 percent (three out of every four) of our first-year students reported that the University of Maine was their first choice of schools. Maine students and families are recognizing the tremendous value they receive here -- a superior education, broad and diverse learning opportunities, a comfortable and attractive campus community, and affordable tuition.

Our out-of-state students also recognize those opportunities and advantages. This year's incoming class includes students from 29 states and 14 countries. Among our first-year out-of-state students, three out of four reported that UMaine was their first choice of schools. Their preference for UMaine serves as a testament to this university's reputation and appeal.

When we consider students for admission, we also take into account their demonstrated level of self-motivation and commitment to service. That's a quality every UMaine student must have to handle the rigors of academic life here. Virtually all of our new students have demonstrated self-motivation and service commitment through participation in student government, community service activities, performing arts, athletics, and other extra-curricular activities during their high school years. We expect that kind of involvement here as well. It cultivates leadership skills, promotes self-discipline, enriches the campus community, and broadens the learning experience in numerous ways.

That's a description of our first-year students. Now let's look at our total student population. This semester we expect a total enrollment of approximately 9,700 students. That's an increase of nearly three percent over last year, taking into account that last academic year we graduated over 1,800 students. Eighty-one percent of this year's students are from Maine. The rest come from 43 other states and 61 nations. Almost 2,100 students, or 21 percent of our student body, will be enrolled as graduate students, with most of those students pursuing master's degrees or Ph.D.s. The other 7,600 students will be enrolled in undergraduate-level courses.

Along with our new and returning students, we have 26 new full-time faculty joining us this academic year. Overall, the University of Maine boasts a full-time faculty of 620, by far the largest collection of teachers, scholars, and researchers found anywhere in Maine.

In addition, we are welcoming new campus leaders who have joined us within the past few weeks. The first is Donald N. Zillman, former dean of the University of Maine Law School, who now serves as interim provost and vice president for academic affairs. Provost Zillman holds the second-highest ranking position on campus.

Dr. Richard Chapman also is new to campus, having arrived about a month ago to assume the duties of Vice President for Student Affairs. Dr. Chapman was most recently at Bucknell University. He will be working closely with students, faculty, and staff to ensure that the University provides a high level of services, programs, and opportunities for its student body.

We also are welcoming a new dean of our College of Engineering, Dr. Larryl Matthews. Dr. Matthews came to UMaine from New Mexico State University. He takes over at a time when exciting things are happening within our engineering programs. We expect Dr. Matthews to raise the profile of that highly respected college even further.

A fourth person -- one who arrived on campus late last semester -- is Susan Reardon, vice president for University Advancement. She starts her first full academic year with a big job -- overseeing the University's

marketing, fundraising, and external relations efforts. Vice President Reardon came to Maine from Ferris State University in Michigan, where she held a similar position.

These four new campus leaders join in our effort to promote learning, discovery, and public engagement, the heritage that makes land-grant universities the most exciting and relevant places to work in all of academia. Our goals are simple but challenging -- to serve the needs of Maine and its people; to generate and disseminate new knowledge; to provide responsible stewardship of University resources; and most of all, to prepare our students for life, careers, citizenship, and change in the 21st century.